

## 3/12/2007 This Week in Congress

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March 12, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

### Caring for America's Heroes

The recent revelations of substandard housing and dysfunctional bureaucracy at Walter Reed Army Medical Center's outpatient care have raised concerns about our nation's ability to care for injured service members returning from the battlefield. The neglect these recuperating individuals experienced at Walter Reed is disgraceful. These heroes deserve the best care and treatment available and we must take action to correct these problems and ensure that our nation is providing top-notch care to all its service men and women.

Since the disclosure of Walter Reed's poor conditions, improvements have been made. The facilities are being repaired, more caseworkers and patient advocates have been hired, and the Secretary of the Army and the commander of Walter Reed have both been replaced. However, we must make sure that none of America's military men and women are falling through the cracks. Several reviews of veterans' care and services are now being conducted, including congressional

hearings and a commission headed by former Kansas Senator Robert J. Dole and former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala. I will continue to work through my position on the House Veterans Affairs Committee to provide service members and veterans with the care they deserve.

#### Working to Protect Citizens' Right to Grassroots Lobby

I recently organized an effort to convince the Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee to oppose any legislation that would require registration and reporting of grassroots lobbying. Fourteen members of Congress joined me in explaining to the Chairman why regulation may inhibit legitimate grassroots groups that play an important role in educating citizens about what is happening in Congress.

Earlier this year, the Senate narrowly rejected a provision that would have subjected groups conducting grassroots efforts to burdensome disclosure requirements, resulting in a chilling effect on their activities. Faced with the risk of severe fines and prosecution, many would decide it is not worth the cost to communicate to the public about policy.

The First Amendment rights of Americans to freely petition, call or visit with their elected representative and encourage others to do the same must be protected. I will continue working to make sure grassroots organizations are free to educate and inform Kansans.

Tim Barker of Pratt Speaks about Ethanol before House Agriculture Subcommittee

This week, Tim Barker of Pratt, Executive Vice President for Orion Ethanol, testified before the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy and Research. The Subcommittee held the hearing to review the finance structure of the renewable energy industry. Mr. Barker testified along with Administration officials, witnesses representing small banks and the farm credit system, venture capitalists, investors and project developers from across America. Mr. Barker discussed Orion Ethanol's projects in the state of Kansas and his company's ability to access financing. He also discussed policy decisions that have helped the ethanol industry develop in Kansas and made suggestions about how the federal government could continue the recent positive growth in the ethanol industry.

#### Discussing Schilling Air Force Base and Fort Riley with Army Corps of Engineers

Colonel Mike Rossi, Commander of the Kansas City Corps of Engineers, met with me this week to discuss many important issues. Col. Rossi gave me an update on the investigations going on at Schilling Air Force Base in Salina and the work to clean up the contamination left at the site. We discussed the progress in building numerous new facilities at Fort Riley as a result of the Base Realignment and Closure process. Col. Rossi relayed to me the importance of making sure funding for these projects continue so they can coincide with the summer construction schedule where most of the foundation work is done. We also discussed projects such as a Wilson Lake water reallocation study and helping Concordia replace their aging dam.

#### Meeting with Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy

I had the opportunity to meet with Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy this week to discuss the role of the legislative branch and the Court upholding and protecting the U.S. Constitution. I enjoyed visiting with him and seeing his Supreme Court Chambers.

## Attending the Unveiling of Jim Richardson's National Geographic Photos

On Sunday, Robba and I were in Lindsborg to visit Small World Gallery, the home gallery of photographer Jim Richardson. The visit was for the unveiling of Jim's latest work - a series of photographs of the Flint Hills. National Geographic magazine is publishing many of the photos in a 22-page story that will appear in the April edition and reach nine million subscribers around the world. Starting next Monday, an exhibit featuring 34 photographs from Jim's National Geographic story will be shown in the rotunda of the State Capitol in Topeka. The exhibit will later travel to more than 30 communities across Kansas. I am also working to bring this display to Washington, D.C., to showcase the beauty of our state.

During his career, Jim has photographed more than 20 stories for National Geographic. In May 2004, the magazine published a story on Cuba, Kansas, that featured photographs by Jim and an essay he wrote on the American Heartland. More information about Jim and his work can be found by visiting the Gallery website.

## Continuing the First District Listening Tour

This Saturday, I will visit Logan and Wallace Counties. In Logan County, I will be in Oakley at the Colonial Steakhouse. In Wallace County, I will be at the Wallace Fire Station. [Click here](#) to view times and addresses and to stay up-to-date on other tour stops still being scheduled.

## In the Office

Members of the National Guard Association of Kansas were in to discuss a number of issues important to the National Guard, including legislation I am sponsoring to lower the Selected Reserve retirement age and enhance G.I. Bill benefits, developing the capabilities of the Great Plains Regional Training Center at Smoky Hill, and improving disaster response. In were Capt. Erik Eppenson, Lt. Col. Tony DeJesus and Lt. Col. Timothy Marlar of Harvey County; SMSgt. Jeff Appenfeller of Shawnee; Col. Scott Dold of Douglas; Lt. Col. Derek Rogers, Executive Director Michele Henry and Public Affairs Director for the Adjutant General Sharon Watson of Topeka; Col. Vic Braden of Lawrence; and Capt. Ryan Strong of Baldwin.

I welcomed to my office Kansas representatives from the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and American Legion to discuss improving conditions at Walter Reed, funding for veterans healthcare, and enhancing education and compensation benefits and claims processing. VFW delegates were Harold Garrett and Diane Hiebert of Wichita; Larry and Lois Meadow of Tonganoxie; Darrell Bencken, Larry Graham and Kenneth Stodgell of Topeka; Bobby and Jeanette Cox of McPherson; Charley Shoemaker of Leavenworth; Karl Musick of Salina; and Phil Irby of Junction City. In with the Kansas American Legion were Pat Culver of Mulvane, Lee Stolfus of Emporia, Frances Swensen of Junction City and Dave Warnken of Hutchinson.

On Wednesday, I joined the Kansas House delegation in attending a breakfast with county officials from across the state. We discussed issues before Congress that the Kansas Delegation can work together on for the benefit of all of Kansas. I discussed the upcoming farm bill, the opportunity to recruit the National Agro- and Bio-defense Facility to Kansas, the Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization, and the ability of county treasurers to continue issuing and renewing driver's licenses at the local level.

Rex Buchanan of Lawrence was in with the Kansas Geological Survey to talk about water research in Kansas. Steve Iliff of Overland Park was in to share Amnesty International's recommendations for relieving the human rights crisis in Darfur, Sudan.

Darin Slack of Oakley, Sean Rafferty of Wichita and Myron Stroup of Fontana were in representing the National Association of Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Office Employees to discuss issues important to FSA employees.

John and Linda Surritte of Lawrence, Gary Townson of Wichita, Elizabeth Bornman of Shawnee Mission, Forrest Holdenman of Lansing, Regina Barger of Kansas City and Regina Singleton of Lenexa were in with the Kansas Federation of National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association to explain the importance of allowing federal retirees to pay for health insurance premiums with pre-tax dollars. John Haas of Larned and Bill Heer, Michael Stamm and Vic Martin of Manhattan were in with the U.S. Canola Association to discuss their priorities for the farm bill.

Dr. Allan Fritz of Manhattan was in with the National Wheat Improvement Committee to tell me about agricultural research efforts by Kansas State University and USDA's Agriculture Research Service, particularly breeding wheat to resist emerging diseases. Roy Dixon of Garden City was in to talk about the aerial surveillance work of the Avian-I company. Jarrod Forbes of Topeka and Tim Barker of Pratt were in with Orion Ethanol to discuss Mr. Barker's testimony before the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy and Research.

Sandy Johnson and Susan Estes of Overland Park, Mike Kilkenny of Paola and Jim Renyer of Sabetha were in to talk about the services provided by the Mid-America Manufacturing Technology Center through the Manufacturing Extension Partnership. Dr. Ralph Richardson, Dean of K-State's College of Veterinary Medicine, and his wife Beverly were in to report on the need to increase the capacity of our nation's veterinary colleges. Brady DeVille of Clay Center, Dale Hayse of Mullinville and Von Tuttle of Gove were in with the National Ground Water Association to talk about the Leaking Underground Storage Tank Trust Fund. Larry Rowlison of Oakley was in to share his support for providing personnel for military funeral honors.

Michelle Hammer of Overland Park was in representing the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation to discuss the need for continued support of the National Institutes of Health and other research to find a cure for diabetes. Phil Guries and Pat Bolen of Salina were in representing the Salina YMCA to advocate for community-wide involvement in combating childhood obesity and to tell me about how YMCA programs can help. Sandy Procter and Paula Peters of Manhattan were in with the Kansas Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program to share their successes.

Robert Krehbiel of Topeka was in with the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission to discuss orphaned and abandoned oil and gas wells. Greg Shelor of Minneola, President of the Kansas Grain Sorghum Producers, was in to describe the group's farm bill priorities. Bill Ramsey of Fort Dodge was in to visit, as was State Senator Carolyn McGinn of Sedgwick, who stopped by with her husband, Mark. In with Via Christi to say hello were Randy Peterson, Natalie Brughi and Carolyn Smith of Wichita.

Throughout the year, students from Kansas travel to our nation's capital to learn about government and tour Washington's monuments and memorials. This week, Alyssa Thomeczek of Fowler and David Weiner of Salina stopped by my office as part of their trip with People to People. Brooke Graves of Ellis and Alyssa Herl of Ogallah also were in with the Congressional Youth Leadership Council to learn more about what I do in Congress.

Several Kansans were in my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol. Larry and Zoa Rowilson of Oakley, Donna Graham of McPherson, Lois Meadows of Tonganoxie, and Peggy Schoepf and Bonnie Swafford of Hutchinson stopped by for a tour. Dale and Monica Hayse of Mullinville came by with their son, Darren. Dana Singleton and Zharmaine Key of Topeka also came by for a tour, as did Sarah Belfry of Lawrence. Bob and Anita Wise of McPherson were in and brought by their grandchildren from Texas, Erin and Daniel Holman.

Contact Me

It is an honor to serve you in Washington, D.C. Please let me know how I can be of assistance. To send me an email, [click here](#).

You can also contact me through one of my offices below:

Very truly yours,

Jerry